

# How my 16-year-old child died of negligence

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...Widow who lost only son in Abuja school laments

From **Fred Ezeh**, Abuja

In these climes, the first day of the month is one day that friends and family members usually call one another and exchange text messages. They congratulate one another on witnessing the end of the passing month and wish one other a happy new month.

But for Mariam Nnenna Ogbe, Wednesday, March 1, was not a good day. It was a tragic day – a day of tears and anguish. It was the day the widow, who lost her husband 12 years ago, lost her only son.

A few minutes after 2pm on that fateful day, her phone rang. It was a distress call from ASACS International Staff School, Bwari, Abuja. Her son, Michael Ogbe, was an SS3 student at the school. Immediately she picked the call, the voice from the other end informed her about the sudden misfortune that had visited her son, and which resulted in the lad's premature death.

She quickly abandoned what she was doing where she worked and rushed to the school to know what could have happened.

ASACS, a school that serves as staff school for Dorben Polytechnic, is located directly behind First Bank and also shares a fence wall with the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in Bwari, Abuja.

The school is owned by the founder of Dorben Polytechnic, Dr. A.B Ekwere. The school runs day and boarding services, and has students from different parts of the federal capital.

## March 1

On that fateful day, the late 16-year-old Michael, who was the only son of his parents, was engaged in sporting activities along with other students in the school premises when the sad incident occurred.

Investigations by the reporter confirmed that Michael had earlier in the morning complained to the school authorities, precisely the school clinic, that he wasn't strong enough to engage in sporting activities.

It was gathered that the school has not had a sports master for quite a long time. It was also gathered that, though the school has a clinic, the facility wasn't equipped to cater to the medical needs of hundreds of students attending the school.

A student that pleaded anonymity said the school clinic had no qualified doctors and nurses to attend to the medical needs of students, even on a sports day.

Another student asserted that Michael had earlier in the morning complained of ill health.

“He visited the school clinic in the morning, but a nurse on duty asked him to take his breakfast first and then return for medication.

“Michael, after the meal, felt a bit stronger and immediately joined his friends on the pitch. I assumed that he totally forgot that he had earlier requested for medical attention, and the nurse that he spoke with probably forgot to remind him of the need for his medication.

“We were surprised when he joined us in the game. We asked him not to participate in the sporting activities since he was complaining about his health. But he insisted and told us that he was fine and would visit the school clinic after the sporting activities. And we all agreed.

“His love for the Yellow House where he belongs made him to participate in the sporting activities. He choose high jump, probably because of his height.

“When he jumped, we thought all was well. A mattress had been provided at the other end of the pitch, but Michael, probably due to his height, jumped and landed on his back beyond where the foam was. He landed on the bare floor and fainted instantly. That was the beginning of the tragedy.

“He was rushed to the school clinic, which was obviously ill-equipped. The medical personnel there tried all they could to revive him, but all was to no avail. When it became obvious that they were fast losing the battle, they rushed him to the nearby Bwari General Hospital where the doctors and nurses also battled until he gave up the ghost.”

### **At Bwari General Hospital**

Medical Director of the hospital, Dr. Osayende Osagie said he was around when the late Michael was brought to the hospital, informing that he mobilised all the doctors to save the life of the student. He said the medical team tried, regretting that Michael could not be saved.

He, however, refused to release the medical records of the late Michael. He said the request must be put in writing and passed through appropriate channels, including the Federal Capital territory (FCT) Hospitals Management Board before such records could be released to anyone.

### **At the home of the Ogbes**

As the news of Michael's sudden death filtered in, the entire neighbourhood became disorganised. Shock, disbelief and confusion pervaded the air. Friends, family members and neighbours rushed from far and near to the home of the Ogbes to get the true picture of the story.

The reporter was one of the early callers. It was indeed a harvest of tears. While some neighbours congregated inside the house to console with the wailing mother, some others were standing in pairs by the wall and under the tree, discussing the ugly development.

Some blamed Michael's death on the school management who they said exhibited a careless attitude towards the lives of their students. But others heaped the blame on the Ministries of Education and Health for not regularly carrying out their supervisory roles on schools.

Michael's mother was grief-stricken. She told the reporter that the school should be held responsible for the death of her son. She accused the school management of ineptitude and carelessness in handling the affairs of the students.

“I am a widow. In fact my husband died 12 years ago, and I had invested all the resources I had in my children. As a matter of fact, I have secured university admission for Michael at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Canada and all documentations have been processed. Now, I have lost him due to the carelessness of ASACS school management.

“He was a great and young bright mind that took interest in software engineering and cyber security. He achieved what people at his age couldn’t achieve. We had great plans for him to get better and quality education abroad to support his IT plans. But all that has gone with the wind. I will greatly miss him,” she said.

She said the relevant authorities should charge the school management for manslaughter. She also accused the federal Ministries of Education and Health of failing in their responsibilities to properly supervise the schools to regularly keep them in check on how they run their schools.

### **School keeps mum**

Meanwhile, the school authorities are keeping mum on the matter. Attempts by the reporter to speak with the principal, general manager and proprietor of the school were unsuccessful.

The school principal wasn’t on seat when the reporter called, but the general manager declined comments. He said the proprietor had not authorised him to speak with journalists on the issue.

When contacted on phone, the proprietor, Dr. A.B Ekwere, neither answered his calls nor replied text messages sent to his phone.